
JRTC Reflections

Of an Enhanced Brigade Commander

BRIGADIER GENERAL FREDERIC J. RAYMOND

The Florida National Guard's 53d Separate Infantry Brigade and attached units completed their 1995 rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center

(JRTC) and returned to home station. The lessons learned from that training have clearly been the most visible and continuing reminders of that experience,

but other remembrances have been equally beneficial. Let me share with you my thoughts and observations:

One of the major hindrances we

faced in our efforts to prepare for the rotation was the absence of institutional knowledge in the brigade task force about the combat training centers, and specifically the JRTC.

As a result, we put more than 200 soldiers, primarily junior officers and NCOs, into the maneuver box at the JRTC within the next 12 months as augmentees with three different brigades from the 101st Airborne Division. We coordinated with each of the brigades several months before their departure from Fort Campbell and identified the individual augmentees, their duty positions, and their assignments within the rotational brigade. This coordination helped match the augmentees with assignments that enhanced their knowledge of their duty positions. (The task force units are shown in the accompanying box.)

To reduce the cost of this training, we deployed the augmentees from Florida on C-130 aircraft directly to the intermediate staging base in Alexandria, Louisiana, where they linked up with the rotational brigade. They returned, again by C-130, from the Army airfield at Fort Polk on the day the maneuver exercise ended. These augmentees provided valuable experience that we incorporated into our train-up for the rotation.

The plan we devised in preparing for the rotation became the model for all our subsequent training. Our rifle platoons' preparation for their movement to contact (MTC) live-fire exercise (LFX) serves as a snapshot of this plan.

First, we ensured competency with individual and leader skills before undertaking the collective tasks associated with the platoon movement to contact. We worked squad MTC LFXs during our annual training period in the summer of 1994 and followed with platoon LFXs on weekend training in September, then again on another weekend two months before our deployment to the JRTC in June 1995.

Both the 101st Airborne and 82d Airborne Divisions were key players in this preparation. The 101st furnished mobile training teams that assisted in the leader training, while the 82d pro-

vided observer-controllers (OCs) who coached and mentored on our final LFX. The net result of this focused and concerted effort was successful platoon performance on the challenging MTC live-fire range at Fort Polk. The time and energy we spent in preparing for these exercises paid additional dividends in the performance of our soldiers in their engagements with the opposing force (OPFOR). In my judgment, this performance justified the allocation of our limited time to small-unit training and the development of proficient squads and platoons through stressful collective training, as in LFXs.

We tried to apply the same concept to our staff training, but with less success. We were able to bolster the skill levels of our staff personnel, and we thought we had achieved enough competency in executing staff functions and in the performance within our tactical operations centers (TOCs). Where we fell short in our training was in failing to inject more stress into the training regimen.

The commander of the JRTC suggested techniques to introduce stress and sleep deprivation into command post exercises (CPXs)—for example, including "wild card" events and beginning CPXs after keeping everyone awake overnight. Since we normally conduct our CPXs on a weekend training assembly that starts on a Friday evening, we now plan to incorporate rehearsals and refresher training into the

available hours between the initial unit formation on Friday and the start of a CPX on Saturday morning. The key, in any event, is to create conditions in short duration exercises that are similar to those a unit will encounter in continuous operations.

Training Objectives

We developed a time line and a scenario for the rotation that proved to be workable. Within this framework, the JRTC's operations group was able to craft enough tactical challenges to evaluate the attainment of our training objectives and give us meaningful feedback for future training. In fact, this time line and scenario became the standard for subsequent enhanced brigade rotations.

Two aspects of our scenario are worth mentioning: First, we did not conduct a forced entry into our operational area. Instead, the brigade task force was inserted as a follow-on force and conducted a battle handoff from a friendly force that was maintaining security of a flight landing strip. We then used the strip as a base to build up our combat power. This particular aspect, in my view, mirrors the most likely method of deploying the brigade in support of a contingency operation. We also embellished our scenario by nearly doubling the usual number of civilians on the battlefield. This feature gave the brigade an opportunity to train in an environment that required coordination

TASK FORCE 53, JRTC 95-08

HQ 53d Infantry Brigade (Separate)
Infantry Battalion (FTX) (2)
Infantry Battalion (CPX) (1)
Field Artillery Battalion
Support Battalion
Brigade HHC
Engineer Company (-)

TF 419 Aviation Group (FLARNG)
Avn TF HQ
AH-64 Company (2)
Assault Company (UH1H)
Medium Lift Company (CH47)
(GAARNG)
MEDEVAC Company (-)
Air Traffic Control Platoon
Weather Flight Detachment
Maintenance Slicc

Heavy Team (E/348 Cav) (GAARNG)
Company FIST
Heavy Engineer Section
ADA Section (Stinger)
Liaisons
3-20th Special Forces Group (-)
(SOCCE)
486th Civil Affairs Battalion (-)
4th ANGLICO (USMCR)
A/711 Signal Battalion (ALARNG)
H/1-21 Infantry (-) (LRSU) (ABN)
(GAARNG)
278th Chemical Company (TNARNG)
337th MI Battalion (-) (USAR)
Company HQ (-)
Collection Company (-)
Intelligence/Surveillance Company (-)
Interrogation Team
Maintenance Element

and liaison with several private and governmental agencies, much the same as we must do when we deploy in support of state and local civil authorities.

The only way I would change the scenario, as I look back, would be to make the defend task the brigade's main mission and allocate more time to its accomplishment. While search and attack provided excellent training value, defend is probably the most likely initial mission a light infantry enhanced brigade can expect upon activation and deployment and should therefore be given priority in training. From my perspective, the training plan to prepare the task force for the rotation was about right. We were notably successful in acquiring the knowledge of what to do.

Two leader training sessions, the augmentees with the 101st Airborne, and JRTC OC visits to home station during the train-up had the desired effect on the brigade. In addition, our senior evaluator for the annual training period, who commanded a brigade of the 101st, conducted a series of evening seminars for the brigade leaders. These sessions covered subjects ranging from how to organize and operate at the intermediate staging base to tactics, techniques, and procedures to consider during the execution of the search and attack and defend missions.

Of course, knowing what to do and actually doing it can be quite different. We struggled to complete tasks that typically would not seem very difficult. As expected, the OPFOR contested all movement on the battlefield, but they were more effective than anticipated and their actions exposed a number of our training deficiencies. Convoy operations and force protection, for example, were identified and incorporated into plans for our next annual training period.

Conversely, we did enjoy a number of successes. The insertion of the task force into the operational area included a very successful night air assault of a field artillery battery and an infantry battalion by a blacked-out helicopter. We conducted a total of 17 LFXs—six MTC, six 81mm mortar, two 107mm mortar, and three artillery battery. The

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

Conduct air deployment from ISB into operational area, and sustain force through aerial resupply.

Exercise C2 of brigade task force operations.

Establish and maintain communications over extended distances.

Protect the force.

Provide logistical and administrative support to sustain a geographically dispersed force.

Conduct CASEVAC in sufficient time to preclude fatalities (died of wounds).

Conduct continuous operations for nine days.

Synchronize battlefield operating systems.

brigade's tactical standing operating procedure was first-rate document and became the model the JRTC offers to rotational units.

Command emphasis on physical fitness and soldiers' loads resulted in minimal heat casualties, and the completion of risk assessments by subordinate units insured a safe rotation with no major injuries. Finally, the 53d Brigade, with assistance from combat service support units of the Florida National Guard, set a new standard for post-rotational clearance at the JRTC. I attribute this latter accomplishment to a number of factors, not the least of which was keeping most of the task force in the field until we had cleared the maneuver training areas, which we did in a day and a half.

I have often been asked what I would do differently if the rotation were reenacted. Unquestionably, I would place far more emphasis on force protection and the training of battlefield survival skills. Too often, the mindset of the troops regarding the OPFOR seemed to be "out of sight, out of mind." Consequently, they were frequently surprised by OPFOR-initiated contacts and paid the price in casualties.

The absence of a well-trained finish force—in the form of a mechanized-armored team or an airmobile infantry

unit, possibly supported by attack helicopters—was a real detriment. The OPFOR's lack of tactical mobility can be exploited, but success depends on swift execution by a unit whose primary task is a finish force mission. The occurrence of fratricide incidents was a major disappointment. Poor fire control measures and imprecise graphics were the primary causes.

On a more personal note, I would spend more of my time circulating on the battlefield. Face-to-face meetings with subordinate commanders can be like a dose of reality, and there is no substitute for seeing things for yourself. A side benefit is that it takes you away from the TOC, where you can easily be distracted by apparently important matters that may not turn out to be the best use of a commander's time and influence. From my perspective, battlefield circulation is time well spent, in spite of any associated risks.

The tempo of the operations also had an unanticipated personal effect. I had been warned about the way a rotation will wear you out. So I made it a point to get four hours sleep each night and actually felt good physically during the entire rotation. What I didn't realize was how mentally fatigued I had become as the rotation progressed. The cumulative effect is not easy to detect. Although I felt physically alert, my perception and ability to comprehend diminished over time. I look back and ask myself, "How did I miss that piece of information or the significance of that specific event?" This is a phenomenon that afflicts all leaders to some degree under these conditions, and its effects should be factored into the decision making process.

Truly, the most gratifying aspect of the rotation was the enthusiasm and motivation displayed by the brigade's young enlisted soldiers. They worked and fought hard throughout the rotation and earned the respect of everyone who observed them, OPFOR and OC alike. They were still fired up and enthusiastic during the recovery operations. It's hard to imagine that they could get excited about taking down concertina wire, separating trash, repackaging

Class IV, and the like, but they did. Without question, they were the strength of the brigade.

The success we realized at the JRTC is even more remarkable when one considers that—aside from the assistance provided by the 101st and 82d Airborne Divisions—we trained ourselves, to a great extent, in preparation for the rotation. We did not have a resident training detachment (RTD). In fact, the only full-time helpers we had for support were the U.S. Army Readiness Group, stationed at Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, and two active-duty advisors assigned to the brigade headquarters. During the prime training period for the rotation, the only additional active component support we had available to us for training assistance was a team of 35 training assessment model evaluators from the 101st Airborne Division.

In addition, during this period the brigade's full-time manning was at 55 percent of its required level, which compares to a full-time force that represents three percent of the brigade's total authorized personnel strength.

I believe the legacy of the JRTC for us will be what we do with the results. For the first time ever, we have a complete picture of performance within the brigade, from top to bottom. The JRTC take-home package is our blueprint for future training. We used it, for example, to obtain a mobile training team

from the 82d Airborne for help in improving information management in the brigade TOC and for annual training in 1996. It should continue to be our guide for years to come, modified by feedback we receive from our yearly training assessments. We plan to continue on the path we took in preparation for the JRTC: staff training, leader training, small-unit training, and a concentration on the basics. In addition, we have an obligation to pass on to others what we have learned from our experience. We took a step in this direction in September 1995 when we presented our JRTC lessons learned to members of the 39th Separate Infantry Brigade, which would follow us to the JRTC in 1996.

What does the future hold for us as an enhanced readiness brigade? Clearly, organizational changes will continue as we move toward the implementation date of 1 October 1998 for full enhancement. We are standing up our military intelligence company and expanding our air defense capability while receiving replacement and additional weapons and equipment throughout the brigade. The major equipment shortfall that we will continue to face into the near future is the absence of the single-channel ground airborne radio system (SINCGARS) and mobile subscriber equipment (MSE). In fact, we had to borrow this equipment to use during our JRTC rotation.

On a brighter note, the training support for both our weekend training and our annual training has taken shape and promises to be a definite improvement over past endeavors. Although our RTD is not yet fully staffed, its members have already had a significant effect on the quality of our training. During our 1996 annual training, we had our first experience with U.S. Army Forces Command's Ground Forces Readiness Enhancement initiative. The 3d Regional Training Brigade, 87th Division (Exercise), the 82d Airborne Division, and our RTD all contributed to a productive and successful training event. The future will only be better. The more we work together as a team, the more effective we will become, with the 53d Brigade as the principal beneficiary.

Our charter is clear: Sustain the performance strengths identified at the JRTC and correct the deficiencies. We now have the team in place to carry out our charter.

Brigadier General Frederic J. Raymond commands the 53d Separate Infantry Brigade, Florida Army National Guard. Commissioned from Officer Candidate School, he served in Vietnam as a rifle platoon leader, reconnaissance platoon leader, and rifle company commander with the 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. He is a 1972 graduate of the University of Tampa.
